BSc Degree Apprenticeship in Digital & Technology Solutions

Final Year and EPA Guidance for Employers and Apprentices 2023-2024

For Apprentices on who started on programme prior to 01 September 2023, working to DTSP Standard v.1.1

CONTENTS

1. Introduction to the final year & EPA

The final year of the degree apprenticeship blends academic and practical elements. It includes three focused modules: two two-week pathway modules (30 credits each) and a one-week digital leadership module (20 credits), all designed to enhance pathways specific skills and leadership abilities. Additionally, apprentices must submit a workplace portfolio, showcasing their practical skills and experiences, and complete a final year project and dissertation.

Through these stages, apprentices will gain the final 120 credits of their BSc degree, and pass through the End Point Assessment (EPA) for the integrated apprenticeship.

The EPA is the final assessment of the apprenticeship. It is carried out by Ada as an End-Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO), registered with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

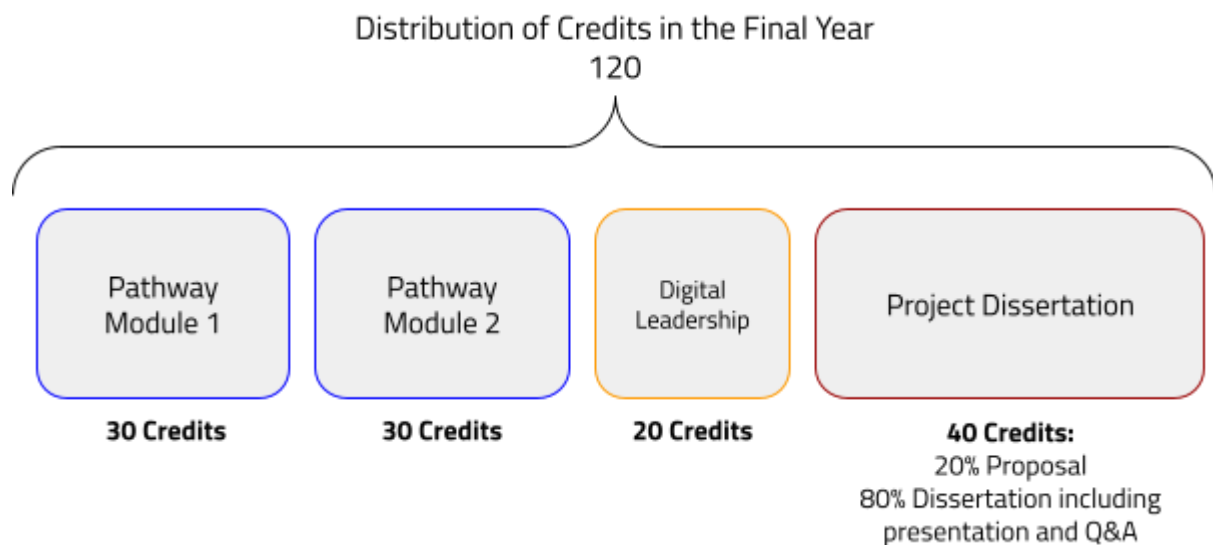The EPA is a holistic assessment of the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) listed in the standard,

https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/apprenticeship-standards/digital-and-technology-solutions-professional-integrated-degree-v1-1

using a variety of methods (e.g. portfolio, project report, interview and presentation). Because this is an integrated degree apprenticeship, elements of the apprenticeship EPA also contribute to the degree awarded. The full BSc degree cannot be awarded without the apprenticeship being completed, and vice versa. However, a separate award is issued for each qualification.

2. BSc (Hons.) Degree and Apprenticeship Assessment

Final Assessment of the BSc (Hons.) Degree

The degree programme consists of 360 credits that will typically take three years to complete. To be awarded the BSc (Hons.) Degree, the apprentice must achieve at least a pass overall in the degree modules, and pass the EPA for the apprenticeship. Performance in the EPA will count towards the overall degree classification and apprentices cannot successfully complete the Bachelor's degree without passing the EPA.

Distribution of Credits in the Final Year
120

| Pathway Module 1 | Pathway Module 2 | Digital Leadership | Project Dissertation |
| 30 Credits | 30 Credits | 20 Credits | 40 Credits: 20% Proposal 80% Dissertation including presentation and Q&A |

The final degree classification is calculated as the weighted average of all the modules undertaken throughout the degree. Modules are weighted according to the credits they carry. For example, a 40 credit module will carry twice the weight as a 20 credit module.

Weighted Average	Degree Classification
70+%	1st Class Degree
60-69%	2.1
50-59%	2.2
40-49%	3rd
0-39%	Fail

Final Assessment of the Apprenticeship

Four assessment elements are used in the EPA for the Digital and Technology Solutions Degree Apprenticeship:

Assessment Method	Completion
A: Project Dissertation **B:** Work-based Portfolio	Completed in the workplace and submitted prior to the Interview day
C: Project Presentation & Q/A **D:** Professional Discussion underpinned by Portfolio	Completed during the Interview day (4-6 weeks after the submission)

Four possible classifications are awarded for completion of the apprenticeship:

Apprenticeship Classifications		
Project Presentation, Dissertation Q/A	**Portfolio Q/A**	**Overall Grading**
Fail	Any grade	Fail
Any grade	Fail	Fail
Pass	Pass	Pass
Merit	Pass	Merit
Distinction	Pass	Distinction

Please note that the project dissertation contributes significantly to the overall apprenticeship classification, as it represents the culmination of the pathway specific skills and behaviours that the apprentice has been developing over the course of the programme. This also reflects the amount of work which has gone into the dissertation and the substantial evidence base it provides for assessment.

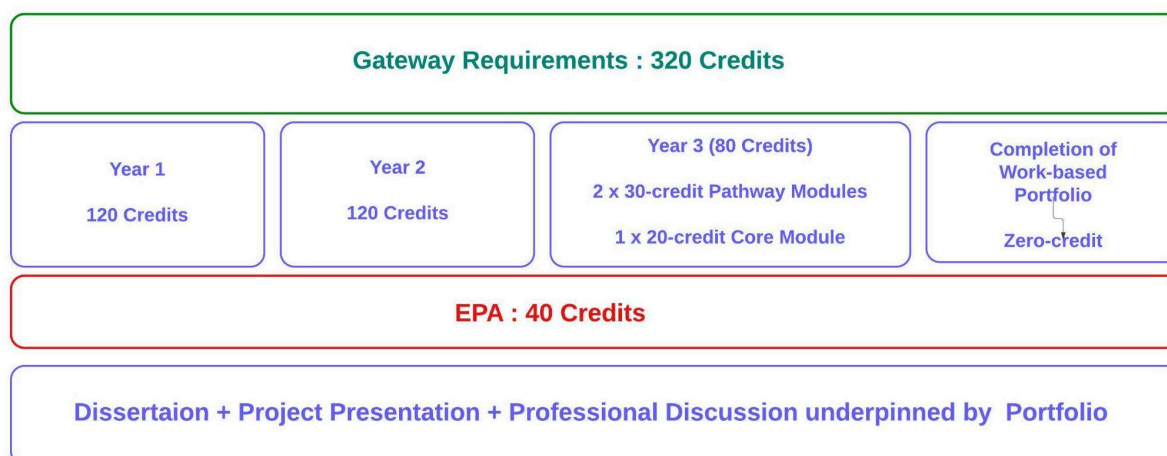The portfolio is assessed as Pass/Fail, but it is not awarded a mark.

Each element of the EPA must be passed individually, e.g. you cannot pass the EPA overall without producing a portfolio or project, or without taking part in the presentation and interviews.

Gateway to the End Point Assessment

The apprentices cannot undergo the end point assessment until they have passed the 'Gateway'. For all apprenticeships the Gateway is the stage at which an apprentice has completed all the mandatory training and learning elements of the apprenticeship programme and is deemed ready by the employer and training provider to proceed to the End-Point Assessment (EPA). The gateway is not an assessment itself; rather, it's a checkpoint to ensure that all prerequisites for the EPA have been met.

Requirements for the Gateway:
- Gained 320 credits in the degree programme (this normally means completing and receiving at least a passing grade for all modules other than the dissertation).
- Achieved English and Maths at level 2 or higher (normally achieved prior to starting the apprenticeship.
- Prepared a complete work-based portfolio.

Gateway Requirements : 320 Credits

| Year 1 120 Credits | Year 2 120 Credits | Year 3 (80 Credits) 2 x 30-credit Pathway Modules 1 x 20-credit Core Module | Completion of Work-based Portfolio Zero-credit |

EPA : 40 Credits

Dissertaion + Project Presentation + Professional Discussion underpinned by Portfolio

3. Project & Dissertation

The project is a substantial piece of work undertaken by the apprentice that delivers tangible business benefits and is closely aligned with the employer's needs. It should be directly relevant

to the apprentice's occupation and the specific pathway of their apprenticeship program. This project will serve as a means for the apprentice to exhibit the knowledge, skills, and behaviours (KSBs) relevant to the standard and specific pathway.

In the project dissertation, including the presentation and subsequent question and answer session, the apprentice must structure their work in a way that best demonstrates the KSBs.

The nature of the project may vary; it could address a specific business problem, tackle a recurrent issue, or develop an idea or opportunity.

For each pathway a high-level descriptor has been provided to indicate the type of project that may be undertaken.

<u>Software Engineer Pathway</u>

> This could be a project to design and develop a significant piece of software or a new software product prototype to achieve defined business objectives, for a defined user group or customer group, to meet the business need and applying appropriate levels of security. It will include significant project planning including estimations of both time and cost to proposed solutions, including technical and commercial aspects of the proposed solution.

<u>Data Analyst Pathway</u>

> This could be a project on Exploratory Data Analysis, the process of generating questions, and investigating them with visualisations in order to allow an analyst to draw conclusions from data to drive business impact. Alternatively, this could be project on Interactive Data Visualisations, using Dashboard or other tools for business-oriented users by focusing on strategic goals rather than technical details. Machine learning and modelling and Big data mining are also other areas that a project can be carried out.

<u>IT Consultant Pathway</u>

> This could be a project on technology entrepreneurship, pioneered in a real- life business. The research may involve taking a technology idea and finding a high-potential commercial opportunity, gathering resources such as talent and capital, figuring out how to sell and market the idea, and managing rapid growth.

Cyber Security Analyst Pathway

This could be an analysis of a given domain and evaluation of security threats and vulnerabilities to planned and installed information systems or services with a robust cyber security solution. It will include significant project planning including estimations of both time and cost to proposed solutions, including technical and commercial aspects of the proposed solution.

Project Proposal

Before starting on the project, apprentices will need to submit a proposal, outlining what the project will involve. This is an important formal step in the process. It is formally assessed and contributes 20% to the overall grade of the project. It needs to be approved by Ada and the employer as suitable before the project can be started.

The project proposal should:
- include a summary of the project plan, research requirements, an overview of how the project will be planned, and timeframes.
- provide the following information:
  - Working title
  - Relevant background information
  - Aims and Objectives,
  - Relevance
  - Resources required
  - Bibliography of required background reading.

If the final submitted proposal isn't approved as suitable the apprentices will be given the opportunity for two more attempts to amend the existing proposal or produce a new one.

Apprentices will be assigned a supervisor after submitting the proposal, who will be able to provide guidance should they need it. The apprentices should also discuss the proposal in detail with their line manager/ employer representative.

For further details on the proposal, please refer to the Google Classroom

Completing the Project

The project should be carried under normal working conditions and in work hours as far as possible. Apprentices are strongly advised to keep notes that will form the draft of your dissertation as they go, giving consideration to the structure of the dissertation.

The apprentice should meet with their supervisor three times while they are working on their project and dissertation. Specific weeks have been allocated for this, as set out in the apprentices calendar, and these should be used to focus on project work and have supervision meetings.

Project Dissertation

The project output will be in the form of a report, referred to as Dissertation.

The dissertation must include at least:
- an introduction
- the scope of the project (including key performance indicators and stakeholder engagement)
- how the outcomes would be achieved
- a project plan
- research and findings
- project outcomes
- recommendations and conclusions.

The dissertation should be submitted in the form of a final report of 6000 words (excluding appendices). A tolerance of 10% is acceptable.

Full guidance on dissertation structure for different pathways can be found on the Google Classroom.

4. Work-Based Portfolio

The portfolio is a collection of evidence that shows how the learner has achieved the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours detailed in the apprenticeship standard. The evidence is organised into **Evidence Summaries**.

You are required to submit 6 Evidence Summaries over the course of your programme (usually 1 in year 1, 3 in year 2 and 2 in year 3). Your Evidence Summaries should meet the assessment criteria related to your pathway. Each statement should focus on providing evidence for at least **one** assessment criteria (e.g. P1).

For further details, including the Standard, Criteria, Guidelines, Templates and samples of Evidence Summaries, please see the Google Classroom for your EPA Portfolio.

The portfolio must be submitted by the final dissertation submission deadline at the latest. You may choose to complete it and submit it sooner.

5. The EPA Interview

The EPA interview is a remote panel meeting, lasting **60 minutes**. Ada will be responsible for coordinating the panel and setting up the interview. The panel will include:
- an internal assessor
- an employer representative
- an independent/ external assessor, arranged by Ada

The purpose of the interview is to:
- Provide a basis for the assessment panel to make a holistic decision about the grade to be awarded.
- Clarify any questions both external and internal assessors have from their assessment of the full portfolio and the dissertation.

Review of Assessment Evidence

Each apprentice's portfolio of evidence and project dissertation will be reviewed by an external assessor, as well as Ada's internal assessor, in advance of the panel against specific criteria.

Any particular aspects of the work that they wish to discuss with the apprentice during the panel interview will be noted, either to confirm their judgement and/or provide further information on which to base grading decisions.

Interview Structure

Project Presentation (15 minutes)

The EPA Interview starts with a 15-minute presentation on the outcomes and impact of the project. This is a chance for the apprentice to bring to life their project and demonstrate its impact on their organisation.

There is no set structure to the presentation, but it is important to remember that the assessors will have already reviewed the project report, so the presentation should only provide high-level summaries, data and evaluation. For example, you might want to consider the following prompts:

- o *What?* the apprentice set out to achieve with the project and what they produced in the report
- o *How?* they approached problems and issues and why they dealt with them that way (demonstrating effective use of the behaviours)
- o *Now what?* What are the implications and impact of the project? What did it achieve? What change did it bring about?

We advise that the apprentice keeps the following key points in mind:

<u>Time management:</u> stick to a maximum of 15 minutes: going over this time limit will reduce the time for your competency-based interview and, more importantly, it does not demonstrate effective time-management skills.

<u>Provide a high-level summary:</u> resist the urge to include every piece of information in your presentation. Remember that the assessor has already reviewed your project, so focus on the impact and high-level summary. If using PowerPoint, aim for 8-10 slides so that you elaborate on your points during the presentation.

<u>Bring the project to life:</u> with the use of pictures, videos, demos and real-life examples. This will help the panel understand your project and its impact in more detail.

Project Q/A (45 minutes)

The presentation is followed by open questioning on the project from the panel in order to :

- Clarify any questions the panel has from their assessment of the project;
- Confirm and validate judgements about the quality of work;

- Explore aspects of the work, including how it was carried out, in more detail;
- Provide a basis for assessors to make a holistic decision about the grade to be awarded.

Professional Discussion underpinned by the Portfolio

The final part of the interview is structured around competency-based questioning on the Portfolio. This will clarify any questions the assessors have from their assessments of the portfolio. The assessors will select the questions based on a review of the portfolio, providing an opportunity for the apprentice to elaborate on any gaps or areas of weakness. As such, the apprentice should review their portfolio in advance to familiarise themselves with its contents.

Competency-based questions encourage the apprentice to draw their real-world experience during the apprenticeship and encourage them to demonstrate the application of knowledge and development of skills and behaviours in the workplace. This will fully test that the apprentice has demonstrated the full range of skills, knowledge and behaviours detailed in the Standard.

6. Results, certification and resits

Results of the end-point-assessment will be communicated to the apprentices and employers 3 weeks after the interviews..

The EPA grades will be sent to the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), who will prepare the apprenticeship certificates. It can take up to 6 weeks for the official certificate of completion to arrive. The certificate will be delivered to the Ada and will be then handed over to the apprentices during the Graduation Ceremony.

Feedback cannot be provided on the interview day as the judgement has to go through internal quality and verification processes by Ada.

Official confirmation of the BSc degree (including final classification) will be communicated to the students, following ratification by Ada Board of Examiners and the Awarding Body, The Open University.

If an apprentice fails an individual element of the EPA then they will be able to retake that element. We will liaise with the apprentice and employer to find a suitable time and discuss any additional requirements that are needed in order to support the apprentice.

7. Roles and responsibilities

Project Dissertation: Roles & Responsibilities	
Apprentice	- Develops the Project Proposal to state the problem definition, project goals/objectives and the approach to planning and completion of the project. - Ensures the project is based on an agreed business problem that forms part of the apprentice's role. - Meets up with the Ada supervisor on a regular basis to discuss the work and report on the progress of the project. - Ensures the completion of the project within the given time and submit the dissertation by the specified deadline. - Prepares a 15-minute presentation before the interview. - Re-familiarise themselves with the project dissertation to be prepared for the interview questioning.

Ada	- Provides clear and comprehensive guidance on the structure and content of the proposal and the dissertation. - Reviews and approves the proposal and provides clear specification of what has to be delivered on completion of the project, as well as the assessment criteria. - In collaboration with the employer, ensures the apprentice has access to the tools and platforms to complete the task. - Assigns a project supervisor from the Academic team to oversee and provide support to the apprentice. - Provides access to 3-4 one-hour meetings between apprentice and supervisor to review the project progress. - Provides feedback on any interim report submitted, prior to completing the dissertation. - Assesses the dissertation as the Internal assessor in collaboration with the External assessor. - Provides guidance and tips on the conduction of the interview. - Releases the results of the EPA, not later than 3 weeks after the completion of all the interviews. - Re-arranges submission in case of re-take.
Employer	- Agrees with the proposal and makes agreement with the apprentice on what systems, tools and platforms will be required to complete the task and how these will be made available. - Provides a suitable project environment ensuring access to all required tools and platforms to complete the task. This may be the apprentice's normal workstation or may be another environment as appropriate to the nature of the project. - Sets aside suitable time for the apprentice to plan, undertake and write up their project. - Assigns someone responsible for monitoring the project from the employer perspective. - Attends the EPA Interview (detailed guide will be provided)

Portfolio: Roles & Responsibilities	
Apprentice	- Attends quarterly review meeting with the Skills Coach - Prepares six Reflective Statements (Evidence Summaries) over the course of 3 years - Ensures the completion of the reflective statements within the given time and submits the portfolio by the specified deadline.
Ada	- Assigns a skills coach to provide support to the apprentice. - Reviews and provides feedback on the drafts of reflective statements and clear specification of what has to be delivered on completion of the portfolio.
Employer	- Provides the apprentice with opportunities to meet all of the criteria for their pathway - Support the apprentice to collect and present evidence for their Evidence Summaries - Provide advice and support regarding confidentiality issues including witness testimony where this is required for validation purposes

8. FAQs

EPA Interview

What will the presentation be based on: project, portfolio or other?

The presentation should be based on the outcomes of the project: what you did in the project and the impact that it had on the organisation. There is no set question or structure.

What will the professional discussion be about: project, portfolio, both or other?

The professional discussion is underpinned by the portfolio, and you will be asked questions on the knowledge, skills and behaviours listed in the standard. You can provide examples from your portfolio or other work-based situations.

Do we need to know and be able to quote theory?

No. You are not assessed on your ability to recite knowledge (this is assessed in the degree qualification). However, you could discuss how you have applied a model or approach in the workplace, in order to demonstrate your development on the apprenticeship and the application of knowledge.

How many questions will there be? Will we be given time to formulate answers or is it quick-fire?

The interview will last around 75 minutes, 45 minutes on the project and 30 minutes on the portfolio, and you can expect around 8-10 questions. Panel members are able to ask clarifying or probing questions These are not quick-fire questions, and you should ensure that you develop your answer using a technique such as STARR.

S- Situation: set the scene
T- Task: describe the purpose
A - Action: explain what you did
R- Result: what was the outcome?
R- Reflection: what did you learn from this experience?

EPA Results

Can I still get the BSc degree without passing the EPA ?

No. This is an integrated degree, i.e; the EPA is embedded within the degree. To be awarded the degree , you must first pass the EPA.

Is it possible to defer the EPA?

If an apprentice is not ready to enter the Gateway (e.g. because the portfolio or a module is incomplete) then the Gateway will not be triggered and the EPA will be delayed. In order to ensure timely completion of the apprenticeship, we would attempt to re-arrange this at the earliest possibility for the apprentice, providing additional support as required.

What happens if you don't pass the EPA?

In the rare event that the apprentice fails one of the assessment elements in the EPA (e.g. the dissertation), they will be given the opportunity to resubmit that individual element (this is known as a 'referral') within two months. All elements have to be passed in order to complete the EPA, but only the individual elements that are failed need to be retaken (i.e. the whole EPA does not have to be retaken).

Will we get feedback on the day of the EPA?

You will not get results or feedback on the day as the assessment judgement has to go through internal quality assurance by Ada. You will receive results and feedback around 15 working days after the live end-point-assessment date.

EPA Panel Members

Does it matter if the employer representative on the panel has only recently started working with me?

The employer representative on the panel should have sufficient knowledge of you, your role and your development on the apprenticeship. If they are new to the organisation and apprenticeships, you might want to discuss other options with your employer, e.g. a mentor who has known you for the duration of your apprenticeship. Alternatively, take the time to sit down with your new line manager to discuss your project and portfolio.

What if the employer representative doesn't make it on the day?

If there is a chance that your named employer representative might not be able to make it on the day, then you should discuss alternate options in advance (ie another representative). If no employer representative is available on the day, then we would have to rearrange the interview, delaying the completion of the apprenticeship.